Mortician says body of Oswald

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By EARL GOLZ

The body buried as Lee Harvey Oswald in Fort Worth would be today "just like it was when I put it in there," vowed the mortician who hermetically sealed it in a steel reinforced concrete vault 16 years ago.

Paul J. Groody said he "over-embalmed" the body and placed it in a 2,700-pound vault "because I knew good and well they may want to take a look at him again."

"If they do, well fine," said the retired mortician who still has his license. "I would be glad to dig him up and show them."

AN ENGLISH LAWYER and author, Michael Eddowes, believes a Russian agent closely resembling Oswald was the person who actually returned to this country in 1962 and assassinated President John F. Kennedy one year later. Oswald had defected to the Soviet Union in 1959.

Eddowes recently was joined by Dallas County medical examiner Dr. Charles Petty in his efforts to exhume the body buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Fort Worth and perform a second autopsy.

The Tarrant County district attorney's office has insisted it will not give permission for an exhumation unless ordered to do so by a proper state court. Tarrant County last summer won a court decision against Eddowes' request as a private citizen for an exhumation, and the case on appeal is not expected to be argued until next April.

When Petty disclosed last week that he was seeking exhumation, he said he was thinking only in terms of compar-

would be in good condition

ing Oswald's 1958 dental charts with the teeth of the corpse and in checking the bone behind the left ear to see if any is missing from a mastoidectomy operation when Oswald was a youngster. A mastoidectomy scar was noted during a Marine Corps physical but not noted about five years later during a 1963 autopsy by county medical examiner Dr. Earl Rose.

NOT KNOWING of Groody's exceptional efforts to preserve the body, Petty said it "is hard to say in what state the preservation of a body buried 16 years would be in."

"There would be nothing that could disturb him," Groody said, "because of the weight and the kind of a vault that it was . . . I know how they are made and all and it's real protection. There's nothing that has caused anything to transpire down there at all."

Oswald supposedly had a scar on his left wrist from an attempted suicide in 1959 after he defected to Russia. He also would have two scars from an accident in the Marines when a .22-caliber automatic he was handling discharged and a bullet lodged in his upper left arm.

Oswald's mother, Marguerite, requested exhumation in 1967 to try to determine whether the scars on the arm existed. She said she did not learn about them until after her son's death.

"It seemed to me that if a boy was in the Marines and he was hospitalized and shot that the family would be notified," she said.

SHE DIDN'T GET the exhumation, she said, "because I never did have any money."

Mrs. Oswald was not the first to seek exhumation.

Exhumation and either cremating the body or moving it were discussed more or less in secret by the Warren Commission and federal investigators during each of the four months after the burial.

The last known written reference to exhumation was by Warren Commission lawyer W. David Slawson on March 16, 1964. His brief memorandum stated under the heading, "Subject: Exhuming Oswald," that Navy Cmdr. James J. Humes of Bethesda, Md., who participated in the autopsy of President Kennedy, "is competent and trustworthy."

"But I just have no recollection of it (writing the memorandum)," Slawson said. "And, of course, if I remember writing it, I don't remember what it was about."

Slawson said he recalled that earlier "no one had ever testified that they had seen scars on him. So, for a while, we were wondering, why, maybe, a good check would be to dig him up and see if he had scars."

SLAWSON SAID A decision subsequently was made not to exhume the body because "the doctors told us the skin scars would probably be decayed and gone. And the other one (reason) was that Marina (Oswald's wife) did testify that yes, she had seen the scars."

One month before Slawson's memorandum a CIA message went to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover stating Marina Oswald had recalled seeing a scar on Oswald's left wrist. The CIA stated, however, that Marina's statements were considered "not adequate and that independent corroborative evidence on this point (Oswald's scar and the suicide attempt) should be obtained if it possible to do so."

"The best evidence cf a scar or scars on the left wrist would, of course, be direct examination by a competent authority," the CIA said, "and we recommend that this be done and that a photograph of the inner and outer surfaces of the left wrist be made if there is no other evidence acceptable to the commission that he did in fact attempt suicide by cutting his wrist."

The Oswald body at the time of the CIA message to Hoover had been buried in Groody's vault for almost three

months.

THREE WEEKS earlier, on Jan. 21, 1964, the Warren Commission met in executive session and discussed exhuming the body and either cremating or moving it to a secret location in a mausoleum. At this point the commission's concern seemed to be vandalism of the gravesite.

In the meeting's transcript, part of which was not declassified until a year ago, Chief Justice Earl Warren said, "it takes officers around the clock to . . . watch and see that they don't come in and exhume him and do something that would further injure the country, and so it has been suggested that to save expense they exhume him and then cremate him.

"But the mother has made some public statements about that, and said she doesn't care how much it costs or what it is, she just won't consent to his cremation . . . I think if we gave any consent to anyone cremating this man, we would be in trouble."

Warren went on to say that "the question might arise before this thing as to something on that body now, I don't know what it is. It might be the course of the bullet. It might be something else. But I don't think we would want that disposed of until our report had been made."

COMMISSION MEMBER John J. McCloy later said he didn't think "we ought to have on the record that we are moving in this thing. We are not saying anything about it."

Another member, Louisiana Rep. Hale Boggs, said he didn't "care if you move that body 20 feet over to somewhere else, somebody is going to say that is not the body and you are going to have to have somebody go down there and pull it out of that mausoleum and have X-rays made and prove it is his body. It may cost a little money to have a cop or two around there (guarding the grave 24 hours a day), but it is worth it."

Warren said he "would much prefer that."

During that same executive session McCloy said he heard *Life* magazine was preparing an article that included an interview with Marina Oswald "and they were throwing in this note she was now saying, giving evidence she was going to put evidence in this thing that he was a Soviet agent."

Allen Dulles, a commission member and former CIA director, told fellow members he knew the *Life* writer, Isaac Don Levine, and "I can get him in and have a friendly talk."

SEN. RICHARD RUSSELL, a commission member, responded, "That will blow the lid if she testifies to that (Oswald was a Soviet agent)."

Such an article never was published in *Life*.

Another discussion of possible exhumation occurred two weeks after the burial in a letter to Nicholas Katzenbach, deputy U.S. attorney general, written by Barefoot Sanders, then U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Texas and now a federal judge for that district.

Sanders asked Katzenbach to "ascertain once and for all that the (Warren) Commission has no interest in having these (Oswald) remains preserved." If it does not, Sanders wrote, he would "see what I can do, as indirectly as possible, to have the Fort Worth police encourage widow Oswald and brother Oswald to have these remains cremated."

"Although this is essentially a local police problem and not ours, still, desecration of the grave is a real possibility and the publicity that would result from such a ghoulish event would be widespread and distasteful," Sanders wrote. "That is the basis of our concern that, if the commission does not want the body preserved, that cremation be had."

TWO DAYS AFTER the burial, Oswald's brother, Robert, was approached by the Tarrant County fire marshal assigned by the Secret Service to help guard the Oswald family at the Inn of Six Flags in Arlington for the week after the assassination.

The fire marshal, Miles Lankford, suggested that the body be exhumed and cremated because "some people in Fort Worth" had objected to his burial in Rose Hill Cemetery, Robert Oswald said.

The brother said Lankford had left three forms for him to sign for cremation permission, but the forms never were signed.

Lankford said he could not recall who asked him to make the suggestion of cremation or who gave him the forms for the Oswald brother to sign. He speculated that it may have been Groody or the Secret Service.

Groody said he did not remember doing it and didn't think he would have after the extra effort he made in preserving the body.

Lankford signed the Oswald death certificate as a witness.

Before signing, he said, "I confirmed through the Secret Service agents that were assigned for protective custody for the Oswald family that the fingerprints that was at Miller Funeral Home in Fort Worth were identical to those on Marine Corps records.

"And I also asked Marguerite and Robert, 'are you sure this is Lee Harvey Oswald?'

"The answer was affirmative in all cases."